Syllabus for Philosophy 5423.25353: Metaethics
MW 4:00-5:15 pm, 239 Murray Hall

Professor: Dr. Justin Horn
Office: 248 Murray Hall
Office Hours: Fridays, Noon to 2 pm, or by easily arranged appointment
Email: justin.horn@okstate.edu

Required Text:
*Foundations of Ethics*, ed. Russ Shafer-Landau and Terence Cuneo
Additional readings (indicated with *) will be available via D2L

Course Description:
This course will provide a general survey of contemporary metaethics, the branch of value theory that is concerned with the status (rather than the content) of morality. The aim of metaethics is not to provide answers to pressing moral questions, but rather to better understand what exactly we are doing when we make moral judgments and moral claims. What does it mean to say that an action is morally wrong? Are there any moral truths? If there are, how can we know them? And why should I be moral, anyway? These are just a few of the questions that we will explore this semester. The first half of the course will survey the main theories in moral ontology, focusing on whether moral facts exist and what their nature might be. During the second half of the course, we’ll take a closer look at a handful of problems that have occupied the attention of those working in metaethics over the last 40 years or so.

Reading summaries: Starting in weeks three and four, you will be expected to prepare a one-page reading summary roughly every other week. The summary is an exercise for you to identify a central argument or two in the week’s reading. You must reconstruct the argument you are writing about as a logically valid argument. Provide some key commentary, raising important questions about the argument(s) you have chosen. These summaries must be emailed to the entire class at least 24 hours before the start of the relevant class. Every seminar participant is expected to carefully read that day’s summary and come to class prepared to critically discuss it. Authors must be prepared to discuss their summaries in class.

Critical papers: Rather than a longer, final term paper, you will be asked to write three 5-6 page papers during the term. These papers must focus on a central argument in one of the readings done in the period prior to the deadline. Please upload your papers as Word documents to the relevant dropbox on D2L. Though the papers are relatively short, I will hold them to very high standards of excellence. I am asking you to write shorter papers to force you to focus sharply, to be concise, to emphasize precision and direct your attention (and mine) to what is essential to your chosen topic. The papers must reconstruct a central argument or two from our reading, and provide a critical assessment of its (or their) plausibility.

Grading: Each critical paper will be worth a quarter of your grade. The remaining quarter of your grade will be based on your reading summaries, as well as your preparedness and participation in class discussions.
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Readings</th>
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<td><strong>Week One (1/18)</strong> Intro to Metaethics</td>
<td>No Reading.</td>
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| **Week Two (1/23, 1/25)** Error Theory | M: Mackie, “The Subjectivity of Values”  
W: Joyce, “The Myth of Morality” |
| **Week Three (1/30, 2/1)** Expressivism | M: Ayer, “Critique of Ethics and Theology” (1)  
W: Blackburn, “How To Be an Ethical Anti-Realist” (2) |
| **Week Four (2/6, 2/8)** Constructivism | M: Harman, “Moral Relativism Defended” (3)  
W: Milo, “Contractarian Constructivism” (4) |
| **Week Five (2/13, 2/15)** Sensibility Theories | M: McDowell, “Values and Secondary Qualities” (1)  
W: Wiggins, “A Sensible Subjectivism?” (2) |
| **Week Six (2/20, 2/22)** Naturalist Realism | M: Boyd, “How To Be a Moral Realist”  
W: Railton, “Moral Realism” (**Paper 1 Due**)
| **Week Seven (2/27, 3/1)** Non-Naturalist Realism | M: Hampton, “The Authority of Reason” (3)  
W: Shafer-Landau, “Ethics as Philosophy” (4) |
| **Week Eight (3/6, 3/8)** Evolution and Metaethics | M: Street, “A Darwinian Dilemma…”* (1)  
W: Copp, “Darwinian Skepticism About Moral Realism”* (2) |
| SPRING BREAK (3/13 – 3/17) | ***NO READING*** |
| **Week Nine (3/20, 3/22)** Moral Motivation | M: Smith, “The Externalist Challenge” (3)  
W: Zangwill, “Externalist Moral Motivation” (4) |
W: Williams, “Internal and External Reasons” (2) |
W: Shafer-Landau, “Moral Reasons” (***Paper 2 Due***) |
| **Week Twelve (4/10, 4/12)** Moral Explanations | M: Harman, “Ethics and Observation” (3)  
W: Sturgeon, “Moral Explanations” (4) |
| **Week Thirteen (4/17, 4/19)** Moral Disagreement | M: Stevenson, “The Nature of Ethical Disagreement” (1)  
W: Brink, “Moral Disagreement” (2) |
| **Week Fourteen (4/24, 4/26)** Moral Knowledge | M: Daniels, “Wide Reflective Equilibrium…” (3)  
W: Audi, “Intuitionism, Pluralism, and the Foundations…” (4) |
| Pre-Finals Week (5/1, 5/3) Taking Stock | M: TBA*  
W: No Reading |

The last 5-6 page paper will be due **Wednesday, May 10th by 4 pm.**